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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ALBANIA PRESENTS ITS ANNUAL NATIONAL PLAN AT NATO

Classified By: CDA Kate Byrnes. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 17, a senior-level Albanian delegation presented Tirana's 2008-2009 Annual National Program to NATO'S Senior Political Committee. The presentation drew praise from Allies. At the same time, several delegations, led by the U.S., raised serious concerns about perceived backsliding in the area of democratic reforms, particularly regarding interference in the work of the General Prosecutor. End Summary

¶2. (C) An Albanian delegation led by National Coordinator for NATO Glori Husi, Deputy Minister of Justice Viktor Gumi, and Ambassador Artur Kuko presented Tirana's 2008-2009 Annual National Program to Allies meeting in the Senior Political Committee. This presentation is expected to be Albania's final Annual National Plan. Albania was invited to begin accession talks with the Alliance at NATO's April 2008 Summit and may formally join the Alliance at the upcoming April 2009 Summit.

¶3. (C) Husi thanked Hungary, the United States, Latvia and Lithuania for their ratifications of accession protocols for Albania,s membership in NATO. He highlighted Albania,s 20 place jump on the Transparency International index, from 105th to 85th, and underlined the IMF,s finding that Albania ranked second in the world in business facilitation. Husi emphasized the unity between the government and the opposition on joining NATO, and pledged future contributions to operations as well as continued reforms. In response to questions from Allies, Husi praised the MAP process, saying its review processes had given Albania a great boost in implementing reforms and measuring up to key yardsticks. Members of the delegation observed that real progress in reforms had come through bilateral and multilateral help, as well as regional cooperation. In this regard, he said the Adriatic Charter had been a big plus. He also underlined that the more recent rise in domestic political will and internal coordination had boosted the process.

¶4. (C) A/DCM Reid, speaking as the representative of the Contact Point Embassy, noted that on September 25 the United States Senate had passed a resolution providing advice and consent to ratification of the NATO accession protocols for Albania. He thanked Albania for its participation in Afghanistan and Iraq, noting that this showed Albania had become a security provider and a reliable NATO partner. Reid said the United States was glad to see that follow up to the explosions at the munitions store at Gerdec was a major priority for the government. He urged Albania to continue its responsible efforts to eliminate its vast stockpile of excess munitions in order to avoid another catastrophe.

¶5. (C) Reid cautioned that, though Albania had made progress

in democratic reform, it had more work to do, including accelerating judicial and electoral reforms. He underlined U.S. concern about the Government's apparent recent attempts to unduly interfere in the work of the Prosecutor General's Office. He strongly urged the Government to respect the independence of all institutions and to promote full, independent investigation of all corruption cases -- free from outside intimidation or pressure.

¶6. (C) Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and Norway all echoed U.S. concerns on perceived challenges to the further development of democracy in Albania. They each challenged Albania to make the gains of recent years irreversible. Germany further requested a letter of intent from Albania stating that reforms would continue post-accession to NATO. The Albanian delegation agreed to provide one. France raised additional questions about air policing and the UK focused on identity cards. The Albanians responded that Tirana is in talks with Rome on air policing and gave details of plans to roll out sufficient numbers of identity cards before the next elections.

¶7. (C) In spite of these areas of concern, Allies were uniformly positive in welcoming Albania into the Alliance. Greece, Hungary, France, Slovenia, Romania, Turkey, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Spain, the UK, Bulgaria, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Norway all took the floor to make welcoming statements.

¶8. (U) An electronic copy of this Annual National Plan has been forwarded to EUR/RPM.
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